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Expert sees danger in radioactive milk

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EXPERT SEES DANGER
IN RADIOACTIVE MILK

MISSOULA--

Children drinking milk contaminated by radioactive iodine may be harmed more than populations living in fallout contaminated areas, an atomic radiation expert said recently (Feb. 20) at the University of Montana.

Dr. Charles W. Mays, an associate research professor in the Radiobiology Division at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City, said large quantities of iodine in milk can cause damage or destruction of the thyroid gland.

He said the thyroid, once damaged, may inhibit a child's growth, causing mental as well as physical retardation.

Dr. Mays, who was featured speaker at UM in a program sponsored by the American Institute of Biological Sciences under a grant from the Atomic Energy Commission, also showed slides of children who were mentally and physically affected by atomic explosions in the Marshall Islands in the Pacific.

Dr. Mays said a study showed that children whose thymus glands were treated with excessive doses of X-rays developed significantly more thyroid tumors during adult life than people not treated. The thymus is located slightly below the thyroid gland near the base of the neck. He said the X-ray is a much milder form of radiation than that caused by atomic explosions.

Dr. Mays said "the surest method of preventing radioactive iodine from getting into children" is to break or eliminate one of the links in the pathway of milk production after an atomic explosion.

He said the links to the child include the atomic explosion, vegetation in pastureland where cattle graze, the cow and the milk produced by the cow.

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The speaker was partially responsible for taking radioactive contaminated milk off the open market in Utah after an atomic explosion in Nevada. Dr. Mays studied wind directions after the explosion and later discovered extraordinarily high amounts of radioactive iodine in milk in areas affected by the fallout.

Recommendations for decreasing the chances of contaminated milk include scheduling atomic blasts in winter months to minimize the amount of radioactive fallout on pasturelands, according to Dr. Mays. He said animals could be fed stored grain during the winter.

Improving predictions and information about where fallout will travel and making this information available to health departments also would help, Dr. Mays added.

He also recommended the monitoring of milk which might be contaminated. Dr. Mays said powdered or canned milk coud be used when fresh milk is being withheld from market.

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